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FBI Director Wray says he intends to resign at end of Biden's term in January

By ERIC TUCKER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) —

FBI Director Christopher Wray told the bureau workforce Wednesday that he plans to resign at the end of President Joe Biden's term in January, an announcement that came a week and a half after President-elect Donald Trump said he would nominate loyalist Kash Patel for the job.

Wray said at a town hall meeting that he would be stepping down "after weeks of careful thought," three years short of the completion of a 10-year term marked by high-profile and politically charged investigations, including that led to two separate indictments of Trump last year. Wray's intended resignation is not unexpected considering that Trump had settled on Patel to be director and had repeatedly aired his ire at Wray, including in a television interview broadcast Sunday. By stepping down rather than waiting to be fired, Wray is trying to avert a collision with the new Trump administration that he said would have further entangled the FBI "deeper into the fray."

"My goal is to keep the focus on our mission — the indispensable work you're doing on behalf of the American people every day," Wray told agency employees. "In my



FBI Director Christopher Wray testifies before a Senate Judiciary Committee oversight hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington, Dec. 5, 2023.

Associated Press

view, this is the best way to avoid dragging the bureau deeper into the fray, while reinforcing the values and principles that are so important to how we do our work." Wray was put in the job by Trump and began the 10-year term — a length meant to insulate the agency from the political influence of changing administrations — in 2017, after Trump fired then-FBI Director James Comey amid an investigation into ties between Russia and the Republican president's campaign.

Trump had telegraphed his

anger with Wray on multiple occasions. Trump said in the recent interview with NBC's "Meet the Press" that "I can't say I'm thrilled with him. He invaded my home," a reference to the FBI search of his Florida property, Mar-a-Lago, two years ago for classified documents from Trump's first term as president. But the soft-spoken director rarely seemed to go out of his way to publicly confront the White House. In fact, Wray was quick to distance himself and his leadership team from the FBI's Russia investigation.

On the same day of a harshly critical inspector general report on that inquiry, Wray announced more than 40 corrective actions to the FBI's process for applying for warrants for secret national security surveillance. He said mistakes made during the Russia inquiry were unacceptable and he helped tighten controls for investigations into candidates for federal office.

FBI officials actively trumpeted those changes to make clear that Wray's leadership had ushered in a different era at the bureau.

Even then, though, Wray's criticism of the investigation was occasionally measured — he did not agree, for instance, with Trump's characterization of it as a "witch hunt" — and there were other instances, particularly in response to specific questions, when he memorably broke with the White House. Last December, he said that there was "no indication" that Ukraine had interfered in the 2016 election, countering a frequent talking point at the time from Trump. When the Trump White House blessed the declassification of materials related to the surveillance of a former Trump campaign aide, Wray made known his displeasure.

Wray angered Trump for saying that antifa was a movement and an ideology but not an organization. Trump had said he would like to designate the group as a terrorist organization.

Wray described in detail Russian efforts to interfere in the 2020 election that Trump lost to Democrat Joe Biden, even though Trump and senior officials in his administration, including his attorney general and national security adviser, maintained that China was the more assertive threat. Wray also said the FBI had not seen evidence of widespread voter fraud, a claim that Trump repeatedly pushed. □



Trucks line up to enter a Port of Oakland shipping terminal on Nov. 10, 2021, in Oakland, Calif.

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — The Environmental Protection Agency is awarding \$144 million in grants to fund 13 projects in California to help the state wean off fossil fuels and phase out big rigs that run on diesel.

The money will go to the state transportation department, cities and school districts,

among others, to purchase some 480 zero-emission vehicles to replace diesel-powered trucks, school buses and other large vehicles. It is part of an EPA program that provides a total of \$735 million to 70 projects across the country, officials announced Wednesday. The grants are paid for by the

EPA awards \$144 million to California to phase out big diesel trucks

2022 climate law approved by congressional Democrats.

The law, officially known as the Inflation Reduction Act, includes nearly \$400 billion in spending and tax credits to accelerate the expansion of clean energy such as wind and solar power, speeding the nation's transition away from the oil, coal and natural gas that largely cause climate change.

The funds, to be delivered in early 2025, "will reduce air pollution, improve health outcomes in nearby communities, and advance the campaign to tackle climate change," EPA Pacific Southwest Regional Administrator

Martha Guzman said in a statement.

California and local agencies will have the next two to three years to implement the grants for zero-emission trucks.

Nationwide, the transportation sector contributes the largest share of greenhouse gas emissions annually, according to the EPA, with medium- and heavy-duty trucks contributing nearly a quarter of those emissions.

Heavy-duty vehicles make up about 3% of vehicles on the road in California, but they generate more than half of nitrogen oxides and fine-particle diesel pollution,

according to the California Air Resources Board. That's because these trucks have diesel engines that, while more powerful, produce more pollution than gasoline engines. They also travel many more miles than passenger vehicles.

California is trying to rid itself of fossil fuels, passing new rules in recent years to phase out fossil fuel-powered cars, trucks, trains and lawn equipment in the nation's most populous state. But those rules still require waivers from the EPA, which typically sets standards for emissions from passenger cars, trucks and other vehicles. □

Blinken faces GOP critics in Congress who say Afghanistan withdrawal 'lit the world on fire'

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and
ELLEN KNICKMEYER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Under fire from congressional Republicans about one of the darkest moments of Joe Biden's presidency, Secretary of State Antony Blinken defended the administration's handling of the disastrous U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, saying Democrats struggled to make the best of a bad pullout deal struck by Donald Trump.

Blinken testified Wednesday before the Republican-led House Foreign Affairs Committee, facing questions and angry criticism from lawmakers for the final time in office. The top U.S. diplomat was expected to leave for the Middle East in the afternoon, but the back-and-forth with members, specifically Republicans who admonished the chaotic withdrawal as his defining legacy, delayed his departure.

Blinken said much of the blame for the sudden collapse of Afghanistan's U.S.-allied government and the chaotic August 2021 evacuation of Americans that followed rested with a withdrawal deal President Trump had reached with the Taliban in 2020 before leaving office.

"To the extent President Biden faced a choice, it



Secretary of State Antony Blinken appears before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, at the Capitol in Washington, Wednesday, Dec. 11, 2024.

Associated Press

was between ending the war or escalating it," Blinken told lawmakers. "Had he not followed through on his predecessor's commitment, attacks on our forces and allies would have resumed and the Taliban's assault on the country's major cities would have commenced."

But McCaul and other Republican lawmakers portrayed Blinken and the Biden administration as ill-prepared and disengaged as the disaster grew, and intent on minimizing mounting evidence that the Tal-

iban would complete a takeover of the country before the last U.S. troops departed.

"This catastrophic event was the beginning of a failed foreign policy that lit the world on fire," McCaul, a Texas Republican, said. He urged Blinken to take "accountability for the disastrous withdrawal."

It was clear "it was going to be a disaster," said Florida Republican Rep. Brian Mast, who will take over as chairman of the committee in the next Congress.

The hearing came at the

end of Blinken's diplomatic service under Biden, with six weeks left before Trump takes office, and at the end of McCaul's time leading the Foreign Affairs committee. It served as a capstone to nearly four years of animosity between the two over the end of America's longest war.

"For my part, I've been determined to learn the lessons from this experience, not only to learn them, but to act on them," Blinken said.

He added, "We've made the State Department

stronger and better able to respond to crises than it was when we found it, or it was during the Afghan evacuation."

There was little new ground broken on the U.S. withdrawal, after years of blame-trading between Republicans and Democrats. Blinken pointed Wednesday to the planned 2026 release of a government-appointed Afghanistan war commission's review as the best prospect of an independent full report on the disastrous events of the summer of 2021.

The 20-year U.S. military occupation of Afghanistan succeeded in routing the al-Qaida militants responsible for the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, whom Afghanistan's fundamentalist Taliban militants had allowed a home. But as the U.S. began its pullout, as set by Trump's deal and carried out by Biden, Taliban fighters routed the U.S.-allied government and military, capturing control of the country within months.

An extremist group's bombing at the Kabul airport killed 13 U.S. service members and nearly 200 Afghans as Americans, Afghan allies and others thronged the airport in hopes of seats on the last U.S. military-run flights out. □

Numerous drone sightings in New Jersey don't pose safety concern, governor says

PRINCETON, N.J. (AP) — Dozens of drones have been spotted at night across New Jersey in recent weeks, including near sensitive sites such as a military research facility, Gov. Phil Murphy said Monday.

Murphy said the drones don't appear to pose a public safety concern.

The FBI has been investigating reports about the mysterious nighttime drone flights that started occurring last month across central New Jersey and has asked the public for help. Since then, residents have reported seeing drones in other areas.

While speaking at an unrelated bill signing event in Princeton, Murphy noted there were 49 reports of drones on Sunday, mostly in Hunterdon County. The Democratic

governor said those numbers included possible sightings and potentially the same drone being reported more than once.

"This is something we're taking deadly seriously. I don't blame people for being frustrated," Murphy said.

It's unclear who is piloting the drones and why, but federal and state officials have repeatedly stressed that there is no known threat to public safety.

Drones are legal in New Jersey for recreational and commercial use, but they are subject to local and Federal Aviation Administration regulations and flight restrictions. Drone operators also must be FAA certified. Most, but not all, of the drones spotted in New Jersey were larger than those typically used by hobbyists. □



New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy speaks during a press conference in Newark, N.J., Aug. 16, 2024.

Associated Press

Gun found on suspect in killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO matches shell casings at scene, police say

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and MARK SCOLFORO
Associated Press

ALTOONA, Pa. (AP) — The gun found on the suspect in the killing of United Healthcare's CEO matched shell casings found at the site of the shooting, New York City's police commissioner said Wednesday.

Suspect Luigi Mangione's fingerprints also matched a water bottle and a snack bar wrapper that police found near the scene in midtown Manhattan, Commissioner Jessica Tisch said at an unrelated news conference. Police had said earlier that they believed the gunman bought the items at a nearby coffee shop while awaiting his target. Mangione, 26, was charged with murder in last week's shooting of Brian Thompson, who led the United States' largest medical insurance company.

Authorities have said that writings found in Mangione's possession hinted at a hatred of corporate greed.

They've recovered a spiral notebook that Mangione kept, along with a three-page, handwritten letter



Gov. Josh Shapiro, center, speaks during a press conference regarding the arrest of suspect Luigi Mangione, Monday, Dec. 9, 2024, in Hollidaysburg, Pa., in the fatal shooting of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson.

Associated Press

found when he was arrested Monday in Pennsylvania, a law enforcement official said Wednesday. Police have not disclosed what was in the notebook. The letter teased the possibility that clues to the attack "some straggling notes and To Do lists that illuminate the gist of it" could be found in the notebook, the law enforcement offi-

cial said. The official wasn't authorized to disclose information about the investigation and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity. The New York Police Department's top detective, Joseph Kenny, told CBS New York on Tuesday that the motive might have been related to an accident that sent Mangione

to an emergency room on July 4, 2023.

A law enforcement bulletin obtained by the AP earlier this week said the letter disdained corporate greed and what Mangione called "parasitic" health insurance companies. The prep school and Ivy League graduate wrote that the U.S. has the most expensive health care system in the

world and that major corporations' profits continue to rise while life expectancy doesn't, according to the bulletin.

In his first public words since his arrest, Mangione shouted about an "insult to the intelligence of the American people" on his way into court Tuesday. Mangione remained jailed without bail Wednesday in Pennsylvania, where he was initially charged with gun and forgery offenses. Manhattan prosecutors were working to bring him to New York. At a brief hearing Tuesday in Pennsylvania, defense lawyer Thomas Dickey said Mangione will not waive extradition and instead wants a hearing on the issue.

"You can't rush to judgment in this case or any case," Dickey said afterward. "He's presumed innocent. Let's not forget that."

Mangione was arrested in Altoona, about 230 miles (about 370 kilometers) west of New York City, after a McDonald's customer recognized him and notified an employee, authorities said. □

Luxury real estate brokers charged in federal indictment with sex trafficking in NYC

By PHILIP MARCELO
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Two luxury real estate brokers and their brother have been charged with sex trafficking, according to a federal indictment unsealed in Manhattan on Wednesday.

Federal prosecutors allege in the indictment that Oren and Tal Alexander, known for brokering deals on high-end properties in New York City and Miami, and sibling Alon Alexander worked together to "repeatedly and violently drug, sexually assault, and rape dozens of victims."

"This conduct was heinous," U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York Damian Williams said

at a news conference in his Manhattan office. Williams said the brothers used their wealth and influence to take advantage of victims during a period

from at least 2010 to 2021. The brothers, who all reside in Miami, used "deception, fraud, and coercion" to entice victims to travel with them or attend parties or

events in which they covered flights, hotels and other expenses, according to the indictment. They even at times used the promise of a romantic relationship, it said.

The women were then drugged and raped by one or more of the brothers, as well as other men, the U.S. Attorney said.

After the assaults, the brothers often gave their victims concert tickets and luxury items, Williams added.

The brothers often met their victims on dating apps, through social events and at bars and nightclubs, but they also used party promoters to "source" women, according to Williams.

The women were often provided drugs, includ-



Oren Alexander and Tal Alexander speak at a panel at the Rockstars of Real Estate Event, Tuesday, Sept. 3, 2013 in New York.

Associated Press

ing cocaine, psychedelic mushrooms and GHB, and the brothers even surreptitiously drugged some of the women's drinks, leaving them physically impaired and unable to fight back or escape from the sexual assaults, prosecutors said in their indictment.

"In some instances, the defendants physically restrained and held down their victims during the rapes and sexual assaults and ignored screams and explicit requests to stop," the indictment said.

Williams said the brothers were arrested in Florida on Wednesday and will appear in Miami federal court before being brought to New York to answer to the charges. □

Palestinians urge support for U.N. resolutions demanding an immediate Gaza ceasefire

By EDITH M. LEDERER

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) —

The Palestinians urged U.N. member nations to support resolutions demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and backing the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees that Israel has moved to ban.

The 193 nations in the U.N. General Assembly will vote on Wednesday after two days of speeches overwhelmingly calling for an end to the 14-month war between Israel and the militant Hamas group.

Israel and its close ally, the United States, are in a minority that has spoken against the resolutions.

While Security Council resolutions are legally binding, General Assembly resolutions are not, though they do reflect world opinion. There are no vetoes in the assembly.

The Palestinians and their supporters went to the General Assembly after the U.S. vetoed a Security Council resolution on Nov. 20 demanding an immedi-



Palestinian girls struggle to reach for food at a distribution center in Khan Younis, Gaza Strip Friday, Dec. 6, 2024.

Associated Press

ate Gaza ceasefire. It was supported by the council's 14 other members but the U.S. objected that it was not linked to an immediate release of hostages taken by Hamas militants during their attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, which triggered the war.

The language of the first resolution before the assembly is similar to the text of the vetoed resolution, demanding "an immediate, unconditional and permanent cease-fire to be respected by all parties," while also reiterating a "demand for the immedi-

ate and unconditional release of all hostages."

The second resolution backs the mandate of the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA, which was established by the General Assembly in 1949.

The text deplores laws ad-

opted by Israel's parliament on Oct. 28 banning UNRWA's activities in the Palestinian territories, a measure to take effect in 90 days.

And it reiterates U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' statements that UNRWA is "the backbone" of all humanitarian operations in Gaza and no organization can replace it. Israel alleges that around a dozen of UNRWA's 13,000 workers in Gaza participated in Hamas' attacks on Israel that precipitated the war. It recently provided the U.N. with over 100 names of UNRWA staff it accuses of having militant ties.

The resolution calls on the Israeli government "to abide by its international obligations, respect the privileges and immunities of UNRWA and uphold its responsibility to allow and facilitate full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian assistance in all its forms into and throughout the entire Gaza Strip." □

EU says asylum rights can be suspended for migrants 'weaponized' by Russia and Belarus

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union on Wednesday gave a greenlight to Poland and other countries on Europe's eastern flank to temporarily suspend asylum rights when they believe that Belarus and Russia are "weaponizing" migrants to destabilize the bloc.

Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk announced plans in October to introduce a law that would suspend asylum applications for up to 60 days as his country struggles with migratory pressures on its border with Belarus, angering human rights groups. The freeze has not yet been enacted.

The number of migrants arriving at the borders of EU member states from Belarus has increased by 66% this year, compared with 2023.

Belarus authorities are accused of helping migrants to get into Europe, including by supplying them with ladders and other devices, according to the European Commission.



Members of a group of some 30 migrants seeking asylum are seen in Bialowieza, Poland, on Sunday, 28 May 2023 across a wall that Poland has built on its border with Belarus to stop massive migrant pressure.

The EU's executive branch also accuses Russian authorities of "facilitating these movements, given that more than 90% of migrants illegally crossing the Polish-Belarusian border

have a Russian student or tourist visa."

It said that "in view of the serious nature of the threat, as well as its persistence," EU member countries can temporarily suspend a migrant's request for international protection in exceptional circumstances. Some migrants are accused of attacking border guards.

The commission monitors EU laws to ensure that they are respected. The right for people to seek asylum when they fear for their lives or safety in their home countries is encoded in the bloc's legislation and international law.

European Commission Executive Vice-President Henna Virkkunen said a freeze on asylum rights should only be used "when the weaponization is posing security threats for member states

and exceptional measures are needed."

Member states would be permitted to restrict a migrant's access to asylum rights, but only under "very strict conditions and (with) in legal limits," she said. "So it means that they have to be truly exceptional, temporary, proportionate and for clearly defined cases."

Virkkunen, who declined to provide details, said the commission is providing 170 million euros (\$179 million) to Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and non-EU country Norway to boost their border defenses, including upgrading electronic surveillance equipment, installing mobile detectors, improving telecommunication networks, and countering drones that might be sent into EU airspace. □

Organized crime gangs expanded into a third of cities in Brazil's Amazon, report finds

By ELÉONORE HUGHES

Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Criminal gangs are operating in over a third of municipalities in Brazil's Amazon rainforest driving a boom in violence, according to a report published Wednesday by a prominent non-profit organization.

Gangs were present this year in 260 of 772 municipalities in the region, compared with 178 in 2023, according to the Brazilian Forum on Public Safety. The entrenchment of "mafia-like" organizations particularly the Red Command and First Capital Command (PCC) "greatly aggravate the situation in the Legal Amazon, which is now seen as a very strategic territory for transnational trafficking, with the circulation of different illicit goods," the report said. The Legal Amazon is an area in nine states of Brazil that's home to the largest hydrographic basin in the world.

Of the 260 municipalities where organized crime groups are present, Red Command controls fully half, up from one-fourth last year, forum president



Brazil Environmental Agency helicopters fly over an illegal mining camp during an operation to try to contain the practice in Yanomami Indigenous territory, Roraima state, Brazil, Feb. 11, 2023.

Associated Press

Renato Sérgio de Lima told The Associated Press.

Red Command expanded into cities in Brazil's northern region after PCC took control of the drug trafficking route via Ponta Pora, a municipality on the border with Paraguay in the center-west region. Red Command has since swallowed up some local factions that

no longer function autonomously, Lima said.

The fact that gangs are securing monopolies on criminal activities could help explain the 6.2% drop in violent deaths across the region from 2021 to 2023, authors wrote in the third edition of the report titled "Cartographies of Violence in the Amazon." However,

"the internalization of violence to rural and forest areas has made small, quiet municipalities some of the most violent in the country," they said. The killings of Indigenous peoples expert Bruno Pereira and British journalist Dom Phillips in 2022 threw into sharp relief the increase in violence in the region. They were trav-

eling along the Itaquai River near the entrance of the Javari Valley Indigenous Territory, which borders Peru and Colombia, when they were attacked. Their bodies were dismembered, burned and buried.

Brazilian police have formally charged a Colombian fish trader as the person who planned their slayings. The killings were motivated by Pereira's efforts to monitor and enforce environmental laws in the region, police have said. Phillips was working on a book about Amazon preservation.

Federal Police detective Alexandre Saraiva, who led police departments in three Amazon states between 2011 and 2021, knew both Phillips and Pereira. "There's no shadow of a doubt" that organized crime in the region has increased in recent years, he said.

The expansion of criminal organizations in the Amazon happened at the same time as the growth of illegal mining, Saraiva said, which sharply increased under former President Jair Bolsonaro, who encouraged the practice. □

Authorities say the mystery disease in Congo might be malaria but more testing is needed

By JEAN-YVES KAMALE
Associated Press

KINSHASA, Congo (AP) — The mystery flu-like illness that has killed dozens of people in southwest Congo in recent weeks might be malaria, according to results from laboratory samples of infected people, authorities said Wednesday.

"Of the 12 samples taken, nine were positive for malaria but these samples were not of very good quality, so we are continuing to research to find out if this is an epidemic," Dr. Jean-Jacques Muyembe, director-general of the National Institute for Biomedical Research in Kinshasa, told The Associated Press.

"But it is very likely that it is

malaria because most of the victims are children," he added.

On Tuesday, the head of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, also said most of

the samples tested positive for malaria, but noted it is possible that more than one disease was involved. He said further samples will be collected and tested. In recent weeks, there

were 416 reported cases of the mystery disease and 31 deaths from it in hospitals, WHO director-general said. There were another 44 deaths in the community, Congo's health minister Roger Kamba said last week.

Most of the cases and deaths are in children under 14 in the remote Panzi health zone in Congo's western Kwango province, according to the WHO.

Panzi resident Ezekiel Kasongo said his 9-year-old son was just released from the hospital after he fell sick two weeks ago.

"He had a high fever, a headache and was very weak," Kasongo told the AP. "We were very worried because of the num-

ber of deaths, especially among children, but God be praised, he is out."

The symptoms include fever, headache, cough and anemia. Experts from the National Rapid Response Team and WHO were in Panzi last week to take samples and investigate. The Panzi health zone, around 435 miles (700 kilometers) from the capital, Kinshasa, is hard to access. The experts took two days to arrive, according to Congo's health minister.

Because of the lack of local testing capacity, samples had to be taken to Kikwit, more than 500 kilometers away, the head of the National Institute for Public Health, Dieudonne Mwamba, said last week. □



A view of the general Hospital Panzi in southwestern Congo, Thursday, Nov 5, 2024.

Associated Press

The legend of the Kibrahacha tree

(Oranjestad)—The Kibrahacha is a famous tree known locally for its bright, yellow flowers that blooms for just three days. Scientifically known as *Tabebuia billbergii*, and in English as the Yellow Poui, this tree is native to the Caribbean islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao, and is considered among locals as one of the most spectacular trees on the island. But did you also know that the beautiful yellow flowers have a story behind them?

The Kibrahacha is said to have extremely hard wood—so hard that it can break an axe. In fact, that's what its name means in Papiamento: "kibra" (break) "hacha" (axe). The flowers bloom around April and May, but this only last for about three days, as the flowers start to fall off and the tree starts growing its green leaves. The Kibrahacha is especially particular, as it's the only one among its neighboring trees to starts blooming first.

The legend of the Kibrahacha

Written by Hubert (Lio Booij)

One day Aterima, who lived west of the hill Sero Warawara, woke up one day to find her father sleeping in his hammock, suffering a bout of terrible fever. Her mother was very worried, and as was the custom in the olden days, asked Aterima to go fetch Kudawecha, who was a epistemophile, to come see his father.

Aterima wasted no time and went to go fetch Kudawecha. Upon telling Kudawecha that her father was sick, he immediately accompanied Aterima back to her hut, where he encountered her father in a bad state. Not willing to waste any time, he told Aretima that the only thing that can cure her father is a home-made potion made out of the Kibrahacha flower. At the time the Kibrahacha was not yet in her blooming season, but the stubborn Kudawecha was determined to bring back Aretima's father back to health, and so off they went to the nearest Kibrahacha tree.

When they arrived at the tree, they saw that it was covered head to toe in thorns, with only a few closed flowers at the very top. Kudawecha, experienced veteran in all things Aruban flora and fauna, told Aretima to start plucking the thorns of the tree to climb to the top where the flowers are. Aretima, just as determined to save her father, didn't hesitate to start.

To her surprise, every time she plucked a thorn of the tree, a bright, yellow flower bloomed in its place. The thorns were hard to pluck out, but Aretima continued plucking with enthusiasm and wonder at the unfolding sight before her. Not too long after she was able to fill her entire satchel with the yellow flowers. Kudawecha, satisfied to see Aretima so happy and encouraged to help her father, took her back to her hut.

Upon arriving back at the hut, Aretima's mother quickly made a tea out of the flowers and gave it to her sick husband. Miraculously,



after just one sip of the tea, the father's fever left his body immediately, and he opened eyes and sprung up feeling new.

The next morning, they all visited the same Kibrahacha tree that saved the life of Aretima's father and they saw another miracle. The tree was covered again in the same bright, yellow flowers, with not a thorn in sight. And as the legend goes, from that day on, the Kibrahacha tree no longer produced any more thorns. □

Craving a late-night snack? We got you covered!



(Oranjestad)—After a night out it's custom to grab yourself a late-night snack on the road. Here in Aruba, there are dozens of food trucks that you can visit to enjoy a late-night bite. Here are a few that can be found in the down town/ hotel area.

Chalo burger

Chalo burger is a favorite among locals, and it's due to its popularity that it has branched out to different parts on the island. One of its main locations is in Palm Beach, near the hotel area. Chalo offers a variety of fast-food meals, like



hamburgers, hotdogs, loaded fries and more! A popular dish among locals is the Salchipapa: loaded fries with sausages, cheese and a mix of sweet and savory sauce. Perfect for those late-night cravings!

Chalo is open Wednesdays through Mondays from 7pm to 12 am (Fridays till 1am), and is located at Palm Beach 178 (a little past the roundabout near the Piazza Gianni's). Other Locations include Tanki Leendert and Savaneta.

Julio's Corner



Situated in a nice little corner off the highway, Julio's Corner has a huge menu comprised of different dishes and snacks, all made with a Venezuelan twist! From arepa's to chicken wings, to pizzas and burgers, Julio's Corner has it all to satisfy your taste! Editor's choice for what to get at Julio's Corner is the quesadilla, which comes with a side of fries.

Julio's Corner is open Mondays through Saturday from 6pm to 2am (Fridays and Saturdays up to 4am), and is located in the parking lot of the Eagle Bowling Palace, right on the other side of the road from the Sasaki gas station.



Habibi Express

Habibi Express is a Lebanese food truck stand, one of very few food trucks on the island to sell Mediterranean food. Located right at the entrance of The Local Market near the cruise ship port, here you can fill your stomach (and heart) with a variety of options like shawarmas, doners, kapsalons and more, all 100% halal. When asked, the chef there recommends all foodies to try their lamb shawarma, as it's a favorite among guests.

Habibi Express is open every day from 5pm to 12am. While you're there, how about a picture with the genie? □



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Don't miss out on L'Avenue's Early Bird Special!



(Oranjestad)—Up to grab an early dinner after a day of shopping or cruising? Take advantage of L'Avenue's Early Bird Special, and experience their innovative twist of traditional Belgian cuisine!

Located in a cozy nook at The Cove Mall—a short walking distance from the Holiday Inn and Paseo Herencia, this Belgian and French bistro offers a delicious and rich menu available through lunch and dinner from 11am to

10pm. Enjoy your lunch and/or dinner in a cool, air-conditioned interior area of the restaurant, accompanied by the warm lights and chic design that emphasizes the restaurant's laid-back, yet sophisticated ambience.

Lunch includes a variety of sandwiches—with a healthy selection of bread options—if you're going for a light meal, but just like their dinner selection, also includes steak, chicken, fish, and even mussels and rabbit if you're craving a bit more of L'Avenue's exquisite menu. And let's not forget their wide selection of Belgian beer and European wine to complete the tasty experience!

But that's not all! L'Avenue



is offering their guests their Early Bird Special, available every day from 4pm to 7pm. Enjoy this affordable and delectable 3-course meal special at a comfortable price of \$29.50 per guest, which includes a selection of their fine in-house wine.

L'Avenue honors and takes

pride in serving the traditional Belgian and French flavors, but does not shy away from offering a flexible menu for their guests' needs. That's right, L'Avenue also offers to cater for their guests' dietary restrictions, making sure that each guest gets well taken care of!

More information

L'Avenue is situated at The Cove Mall in Palm Beach and is open every day from 11am to 10pm for lunch and dinner. To book a reservation or ask for more information, please contact their phone line at +297 6996400, send an e-mail info@lavenuearuba.com, or visit their website at lavenuearuba.com □



Ever heard of the cah'i orgel? A key instrument in Aruban folklore music

(Oranjestad)—The cah'i orgel music box is an important and unique instrument that is used on the ABC islands in the Dutch Caribbean. This instrument is a staple in our folklore music, and its significance in the traditions of Aruba has and continues to bring together the old and young.

The origin of the cah'i orgel is said to have come from Europe around 150 years ago. A cross breed between the barrel piano and the organ, the most popular stories said that the instrument came from either England or Germany, but made its way to Italy down

to Venezuela, where in 1881, Mr. Horatio Sprock (1866-1949) from Curacao was first introduced to it. After that, Sprock made his own cah'i orgel "Josefina", and successfully debuted it on the streets of Barquisimeto. Back in Curacao, he started his own cah'i orgel business along with his brother Luis. In Aruba, it is said that the cah'i orgel was introduced by Rufo Wever, who later in his career became one of the composers for the Aruban national anthem.

Rufo Wever was a young musician in 1937 when he established his own cah'i orgel business on the is-

land. Before that he experimented with his uncle's cah'i orgel, and he over the years he learned to build and repair the instrument. In fact, he was incredibly skilled in this, and he was one of the few to have recognized from the start that the cah'i orgel is an instrument that needs preserving.

As mentioned, the cah'i orgel is a music box made from mahogany wood, it contains a cylinder with a maximum of eight music pieces. By rotating the lever on the front side of the box, the cah'i orgel produces music similar to that of a piano, and is accompanied often by someone else playing the "wiri", a

percussion instrument made out of steel and reminiscent to the Spanish guiro. Back then, you would often also find someone playing the triangle alongside the cah'i orgel and wiri. In Aruba, the cah'i orgel and wiri is used for traditional music genres, such as the Aruban waltz, tumba, mazurka and more.

Fun fact: another name for the cah'i orgel is the "tingilingi box."

Source: "E Cilinder Magico entre Aruba y Curaçao" by Marilyn Alcalá-Wallé, Herta Parabirsing-Balentina and Nidia Rosaria-Wallé. □

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Tierra del Sol Golf Course by Iberostar Celebrates the First Shoco Sanctuary in Aruba

Tierra del Sol Golf Course by Iberostar proudly announces the opening of the Shoco Sanctuary, dedicated to protecting and preserving Aruba's beloved national symbol, the Aruba Burrowing Owl (Shoco). This initiative, started in 2019, has flourished into a significant conservation effort, showcasing a remarkable journey of progress and commitment over the past five years.

In collaboration with Aruba Birdlife Conservation (ABC) and Tierra del Sol Golf Course by Iberostar, the first 20 artificial burrows were placed in 2019 to provide safe breeding grounds for the endangered Shoco. With the continued support of Iberostar, this project has expanded, increasing the number of burrows to 32 artificial burrows and integrating educational components into the golf course experience.

The sanctuary was celebrated with an event attended by key partners in the project, recognizing the milestone and reaffirming the commit-

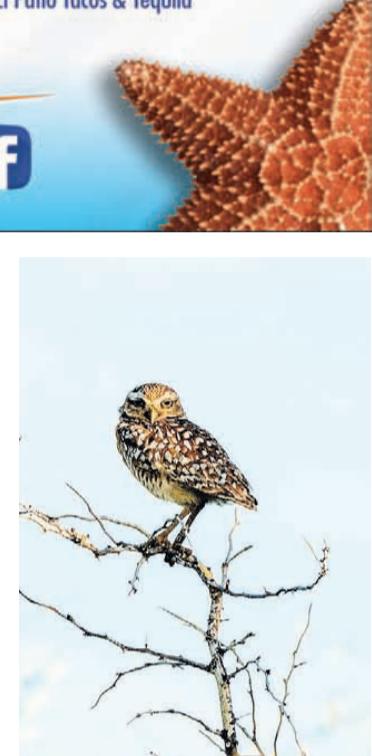


ment to Aruba's biodiversity. Guests, stakeholders & community members marveled at the progress seen from the initial installation in 2019 to the thriving sanctuary today. The Shoco, declared a national symbol in 2012, faces significant threats from loss of habitat. This sanctuary aims to combat these challenges, offering safer breeding opportunities and enhancing the local ecosystem. This sanctuary now hosts 20% of Aruba's entire Shoco population, making it a cornerstone of the island's conservation efforts.

As the golf course undergoes



a transformation, Iberostar has embraced this conservation project as part of its sustainable vision. The sanctuary is integrated into the course's design, providing golfers and visitors with information about the Shoco and fostering awareness about Aruba's natural heritage. By the end of 2024, as the golf course prepares for its grand reopening, the Shoco Sanctuary will stand as a testament to community collaboration and environmental stewardship. Tierra



del Sol Golf Course by Iberostar invites the local community to join in this journey of preserving Aruba's treasures for generations to come. □

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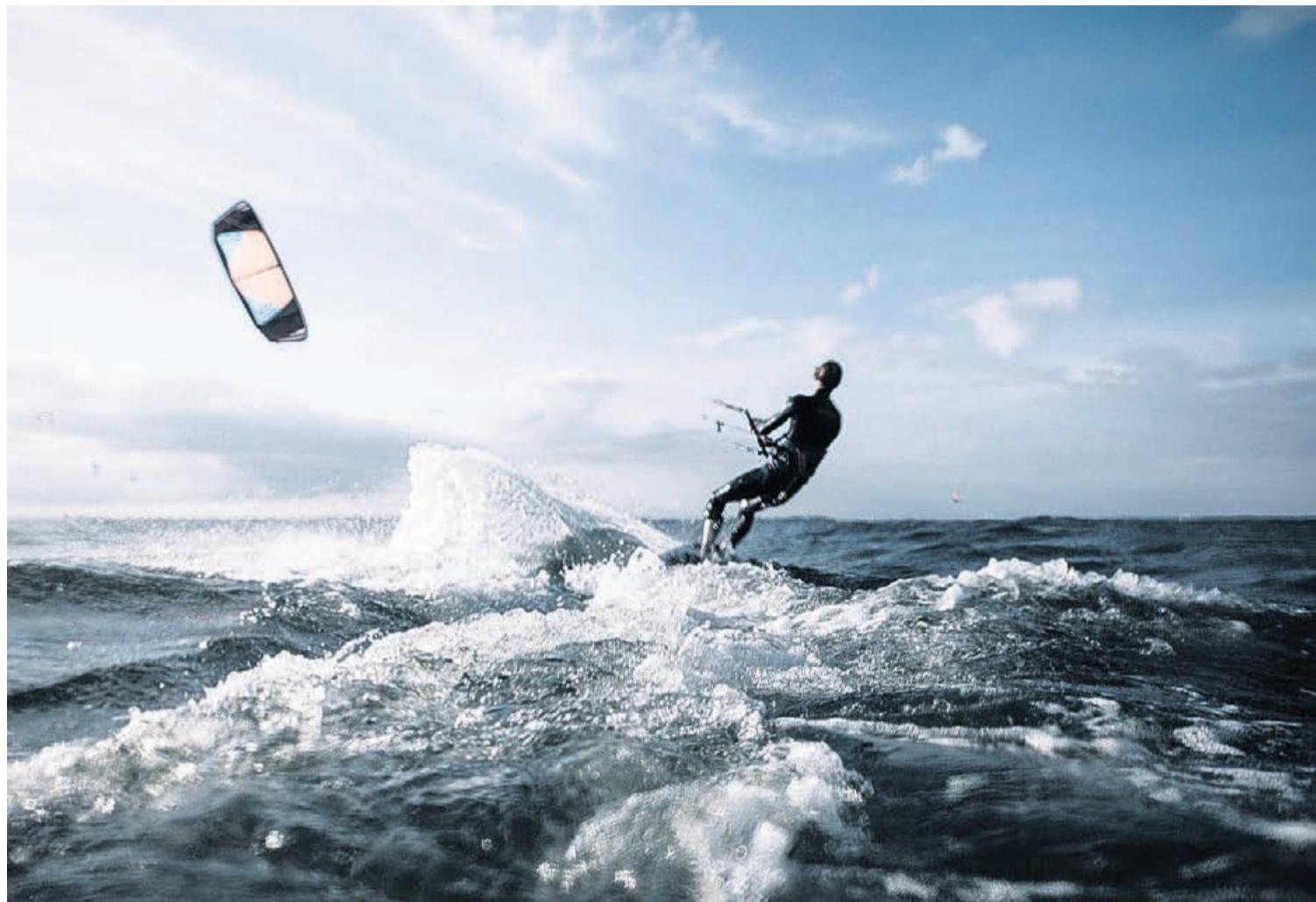
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Surf's Up: Favorite places to catch waves in Aruba



ORANJESTAD – Whether you are a salt-seasoned surfer looking for a thrill, or just looking to wet your toes in a little ocean adventure, Aruba has amazing places to learn and practice surfing! Although more known for the calmer waters of Palm Beach, Eagle Beach and Mangel Halto, Aruba also has some special places to thrill your senses.

Because of strong winds and breezes, Aruba is perfect for wind and kite surfing. You will surely notice kites in the air as

you drive around the wilder, rougher areas on Aruba's east side.

There are plenty of surf shop rentals to help you with your gear, and there are also a lot of tutors if you're looking to try for the first time and need a little help. These can be found around the island, and will surely come in hand if you're wanting to try a new experience!

With that said, here are Aruba's favorite surf spots!

Andicuri
Andicuri is recognized as the best place for body boarding. Because of the rough waves, this beach is better suited for those with more experience in surfing. However, the beach with two bluffs – one on each side – is worth a visit, if only to watch the exciting show presented by the surfers.

To go to Andicuri, you will need a 4x4 vehicle and drive from the ex-Natural Bridge Center. Alternatively, you can make it an adventure

by going on a hike! The scenery is unique and beautiful on its own.

Reaching Andicuri Beach can be an adventure in itself, as it can be difficult to find and is only accessible by 4x4 vehicle or walking from the ex-Natural Bridge center, but the impressive scenery makes it all worthwhile!

Arashi
Arashi, a beach located close to the California Lighthouse, is a good spot for learning and having fun – if

you're lucky! The waves at Arashi are usually calm, but with just the right weather, a swell forms attracting all the local surfers to the area.

Boca Grandi

Boca Grandi is at the most southern spot in Aruba, and is a popular spot with experienced surfers. Close to the famous Red Anchor and our beloved Sunrise City – San Nicolas, a trip to Boca Grandi can easily turn into an all-day trip to this area of the island. With a beautiful beach (although it is not allowed to swim here, because of strong currents), you can enjoy a relaxing time combing the beach for driftwood, coral, and little crabs and snails.

Hadicurari

Known locally as Fisherman's Hut, here is where you will find most of the action for surfers in Aruba. With a variety of surf shops and schools in this area, you will find it easy to get in on the action. Hadicurari is also the site of the Aruba Hi Winds World Challenge, which takes place usually in June/July, and it is the largest windsurfing competition in the Caribbean!

Malmok

If you're a beginner, this is your spot. There are also various shops to rent gear and receive lessons, facilitating learning and just trying out a new experience. The beach is also popular for paddleboarding and other watersport activities.□





For a small island, Aruba sure has a lot of unique treasures. Among these, we have some subspecies of animals that are unique to our island. These have evolved to perfectly adapt to our desert climate and make Aruba their home. At the same time, they are part of what makes Aruba truly one of a kind.

Cascabel (rattlesnake, *Crotalus durissus unicolor*)

According to the Arikok National Park, Aruba knows two kinds of snakes, the Santanero and the Cascabel. The cascabel belongs to the rattlesnake family. The cascabel is the only venomous snake from Aruba. It has a length of 65cm to 100cm, and is about 4 to 5cm wide. Its color varies from light brown to grey-brown, and its underbelly is white. On its back there are marks that are a little darker, in the shape of diamonds.

Its reproduction is oviparous, meaning the offspring can hatch from their eggs just before, during or immediately after laying.

The cascabel lives mainly in the Arikok National Park. It likes to live in dark places, and is thus found hidden among the limestone rocks and under stones. As a defense mechanism, the cascabel uses its rattle as a warning, and it is not an aggressive animal.

The cascabel feeds on lizards, small mammals such as rats and mice. It paralyzes or kills its prey with its venom, which is injected through a bite. The enemies of the casca-

bel are donkeys, goats, humans and cars. Humans are the biggest enemy of the cascabel, as they kill them and destroy their habitat for urbanization.

Shoco (burrowing owl, *Athene cunicularia arubensis*)

The shoco is a small bird which is seldom seen. They are active during the day but are more active later in the day and at night for hunting. These owls have very good night vision and very good hearing. The shoco is the national symbol of Aruba.

The shoco has about 20cm of length, and the females are slightly heavier than the males. They are light brown in color, with many white spots. The belly of the Shoco is either white or light brown, and the shoco has striking yellow eyes. Its beak is yellow/green. Young owls do not have white spots and are lighter in color. The nest of the shoco is a burrow in the ground. If the shoco cannot find a burrow, it will dig one in soft soil. The shoco lays one or two eggs every other day until all the eggs are laid – a shoco can lay up to four eggs. The first owlets hatch after three to four weeks. The shoco owl takes care of the owlets for three months until they leave the nest. Only a few owlets survive.

The owls dig burrows in the ground with low grass vegetation. An owl can live up to nine years.

Its defense mechanism is simply to fly away or retreat to its burrows. They eat mostly insects, mice and

Unique fauna of Aruba

lizards, and the main threats to their survival are boas – an invasive species introduced by humans as pets – and humans through destruction of their habitat.

Prikichi

(parakeet, *Aratinga pertinax*)

The Prikichi is the national bird of Aruba. On Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, parakeets can be found, but each of the three islands has a different breed. The Yellow-shouldered Amazon parakeet that we have on Aruba is also found along the coast of Venezuela. Unfortunately, there is interbreeding between the breeds due to cage birds from, for example, Curaçao being released on Aruba. The parakeet population on Aruba is in danger due to extensive deforestation occurring on the island because of the growing population.

The prikichi weighs between 90 to 100 grams. It has a greenish-brown head with some yellow around the eye. The back and wings of the parakeet are dark green, and the underside of the body is a lighter shade of green. There is also a bit of blue in the wings. The parakeet's beak is gray/black.

Parakeets often use termite nests as breeding sites. Parakeets are found in all natural environments (mondi) of the island. It defends itself by flying away and loud cries. Parakeets eat seeds from the pods of the Kwihi tree, Divi Divi, and columnar cactus. They also consume natural fruits. Its main predators are boa constrictors, humans.

Conew (cottontail rabbit, *Sylvilagus floridanus nigronuchalis*)

The Eastern Cottontail rabbit (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) was probably brought over to the island by Indian settlers thousands of years ago as a source of food. This rabbit, locally known as Conew, has spread all over the island and has become part of our ecosystem. The very adaptable Conew can live in

a wide variety of habitats, including Aruba's xeric scrublands, where it typically grazes on weeds and grasses.

The Aruban Conew has a brownish grey color and a distinctive white belly. This white fur extends to the bottom of the tail which becomes visible as the rabbit runs. These rabbits can grow up to approximately 40 centimeters in length over their short lifespan of 3 years. Cottontail rabbits reach reproductive maturity when they are just 2 to 3 months old. A female rabbit, called a doe, finds a suitable nest spot under a shrub or rocks and lines it with fur. She can have an average of 3 to 4 litters per year averaging 5 young each. The doe only visits her young once or twice a day to nurse her babies for a period of 2 to 3 weeks. The young reach independence at 4 to 5 weeks.

The Aruban Conew is an endangered species and protected by Aruban law. The Conew is thought to have drastically declined due to an increase in human activities, habitat fragmentation and predation by the invasive Boa constrictor as well as feral cats and dogs. However, recently there seem to be more rabbit sightings in rural and wilderness areas and also in the National Park. This could be linked to a recent decline of the invasive Boa population after the long period of drought. As the Conew can reproduce very quickly, a short break in predation pressure can lead to a fast increase of rabbits. Sadly, the Boas are back on the rise again with the truly wet rainy seasons we have recently experienced. This could cause a new decline in the Conew population that was just starting to recover.

These are but a few of Aruba's beautiful inhabitant, which we must all contribute to protect. For more information, visit <https://www.arubanationalpark.org/main/flora-fauna/> □

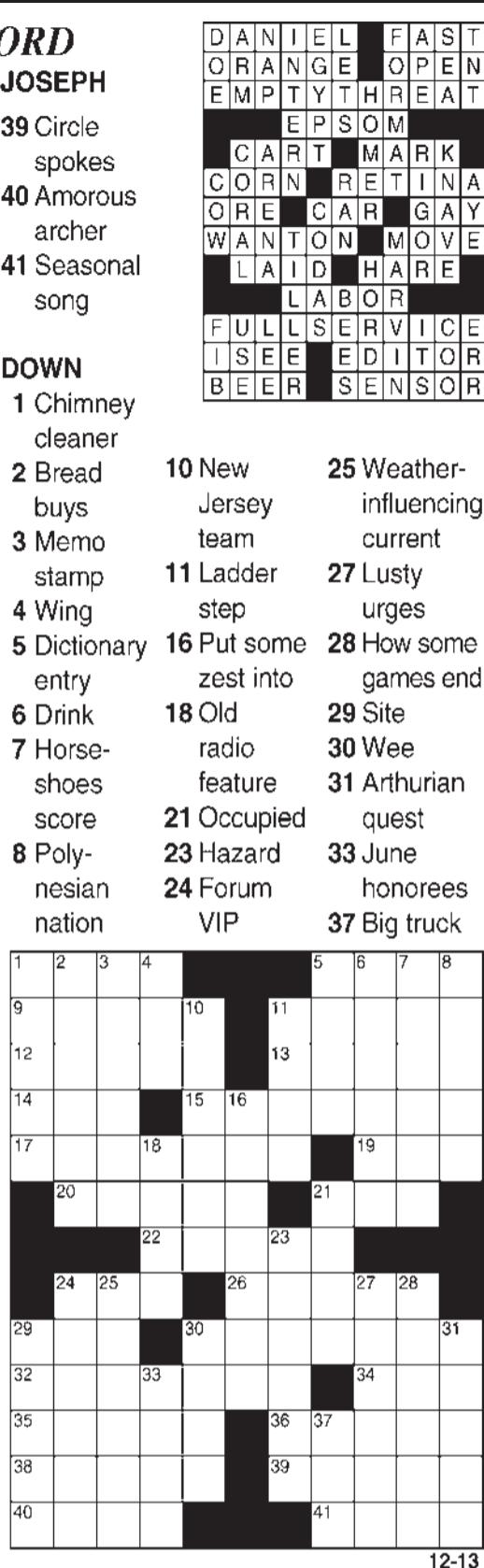


CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Pivot spokes
- 5 Lose freshness
- 9 Our home
- 11 Lover of drama
- 12 Aerie builder
- 13 City-based
- 14 Second person
- 15 Purpose of certain machines
- 17 Un-decided
- 19 Arthur of TV
- 20 Not moving
- 21 That lady
- 22 Digression
- 24 Animation frame
- 26 Singer Frankie
- 29 Buddy
- 30 Watching over
- 32 Bank business
- 34 Butter unit
- 35 Korean or Thai
- 36 Tony-winning musical of 1980
- 38 Halloween haul



A X Y D L B A A X R
is L O N G F E L L O W

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

12-13

CRYPTOQUOTE

O E V G T G E T A G W U G D E U X S

V G A X F H M B E U . — E A W B ,

“B U E Y G H”

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: I'M AT A PLACE IN MY LIFE WHEN ERRANDS ARE STARTING TO COUNT AS GOING OUT. — ANONYMOUS

Cruise ship Schedule: December 09 - 15 2024

		ARR	DEPT	BERTH
MON	09	CELEBRITY ECLIPSE	08.00	21.00
TUE	10	CELEBRITY REFLECTION	08.00	21.00
		CARNIVAL HORIZON	08.00	22.00
		EMERALD PRINCESS	09.00	22.00
WED	11	ZUIDERDAM	07.00	16.00
		AIDABELLA	10.00	****
		SILVER MOON	08.00	23.00
		FREEWINDS	06.00	****
THU	12	MARELLA DISCOVERY	08.00	20.00
		AIDABELLA - Dept.	****	18.00
FRI	13	EVIRIMA	07.00	19.00
		CARNIVAL VENEZIA	09.00	22.00
SUN	15	OCEANIA NAUTICA	11:00	21:00
		EURODAM	08.00	17.00
		FREEWINDS - DEPT.	****	22.15

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

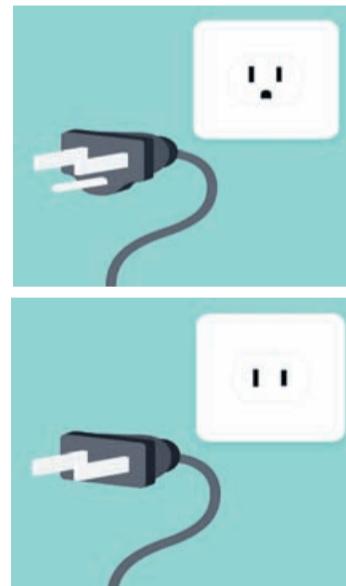
Supermarket hours



(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic but important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.

lets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.

Electrical power



Drinking water



Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are open from 8am to 9 or 10pm, Monday through Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier; mostly around 2pm.

Safety



The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.

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Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occur, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

Classifieds

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One bedroom week # 01 room #654
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Divi Village
Eagle beach
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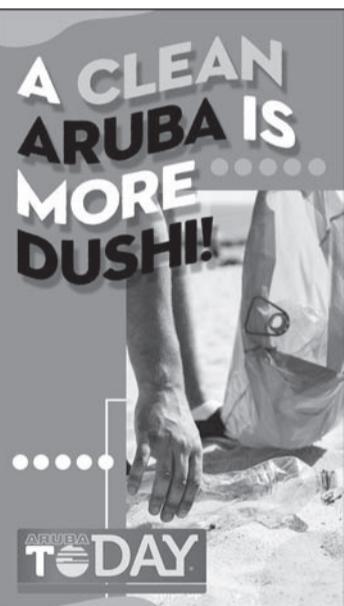
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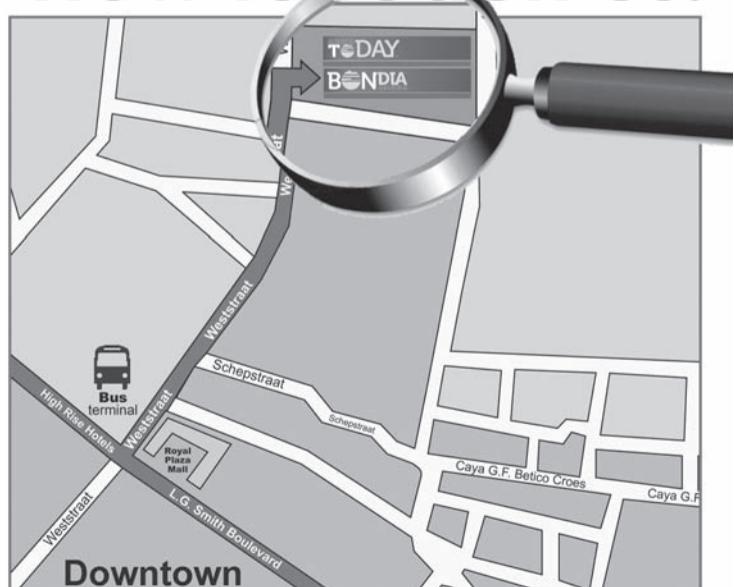
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Red Cross	582 2219

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Taxi D.T.S.	587 2300
Taxi Serv. Aruba	583 3232
A1 Taxi Serv.	280 2828

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Avianca	588 0059
Jet Blue	588 2244
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Alcoholics Anonymous	Tel. 736 2952
Narcotics Anonymous	Tel. 583 8989

Fundacion Contra Violencia

Relacional Tel. 583 5400

Centre for Diabetes

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Child Abuse Prevention

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Quota Club Tel. 525 2672

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ARUBA TODAY NEWS

Is Secret Santa stressing you out? Here's your holiday gift-exchange survival guide

By KAITLYN HUAMANI

Associated Press

The commencement of the holiday season often means the lengthening of to-do lists.

There are lights to hang, cards to mail, cookies to bake and, of course, gifts to buy. Gift exchanges, whether they're among friends, family or co-workers, can be a fun way to get in the holiday spirit. But it can also be another stressor during a busy time of year.

Secret Santa exchanges where participants are assigned a gift recipient and tasked with finding them a perfect present within a price limit sometimes mean that those in friend groups are paired with "frenemies," someone inevitably draws themselves, or colleagues who are virtually strangers are matched up. Those possible pitfalls inspired Peter Imburg to create Elfster, a free online Secret Santa organizer, after he saw the time and effort it took to coordinate the logistics of a gift exchange with his family over 20 years ago.

More top-down organiza-



A shopper carries a Christmas-themed bag in London on Dec. 2, 2020.

Associated Press

tion, he says, helps things run more smoothly.

Say goodbye to picking names from a hat. Elfster, for instance, creates pairings, asks for wish lists, offers gift suggestions at different price points and sends reminders, among other features meant to make the organizational hurdles of a gift exchange less daunting.

"The organizer is like the hero. They make it all hap-

pen," Imburg said, adding that his site aims "to make it a lot easier for the organizer to do that with a minimal amount of effort."

Reliable gift ideas
Cameron Rogers, a New Jersey-based social media content creator and podcast host on wellness and motherhood, understands the stress that gift exchanges can bring up.

"Having to give generic gifts to people I'm not

necessarily close with is extremely difficult," Rogers said. "I can pick a good gift for my husband or my kids or my mom, but for people who I don't know the ins and outs of their lives, I think it's hard to pick something that you know they're actually going to enjoy." She recently shared a guide to Secret Santa gifts under \$50 on her social media channels, emphasizing how challenging it can be

to find something within a set price range that will be well-received.

Gifts with a specific purpose—kitchen gadgets, home items or winter gear—and gifts that have a personalized aspect like a monogram are good go-to options for anyone feeling lost after receiving their Secret Santa assignment, she said.

Imburg said the "gift gurus" at Elfster also have suggestions, especially for recipients who aren't offering any clues as to what they'd like. In a similar vein as Rogers, the Elfster team offered ideas for some practical gifts, like water bottles, blankets and massage guns. Other no-nonsense home and kitchen items, like food storage containers, charging stations and more are featured on the site's "Top Trending Gift Ideas for 2024" list.

Gift cards, although they are not particularly glamorous, are an essentially foolproof option, Rogers said, and they won't leave your recipient wondering where they'll find room on their shelf for another mug or book. □

Fortnite players 'tricked' into unwanted purchases are starting to get refunds. Here's how to apply

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS

AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP)—U.S. consumers who were "tricked" into purchases they didn't

want from Fortnite maker Epic Games are now starting to receive refund checks, the Federal Trade Commission said this week. Back in 2022, Epic agreed

to pay a total of \$520 million to settle complaints revolving around children's privacy and payment methods on its popular Fortnite game. The FTC alleged the video game giant used deceptive online design tactics to trick Fortnite players, including children, into making unintended purchases "based on the press of a single button."

Consumers could be charged while doing something as simple as attempting to wake the game from sleep mode, for example, or by pressing a nearby button when trying to preview an item, the agency said. The FTC also accused Epic of blocking some users who disputed the charges from accessing the content

they purchased.

Beyond a \$275 million fine related to collecting personal information on players under the age of 13, the settlement included \$245 million in customer refunds. Now, the first batch of those refunds are being sent out. On Monday, the FTC announced it was sending over 629,000 payments to eligible customers who submitted claims. About half of those refunds are PayPal payments, which should be redeemed within 30 days, and the rest are checks, which should be cashed within 90 days.

The average refund is about \$114, the FTC noted. This first round of payments amounts to a total of more than \$72 million, accord-

ing to the agency, leaving about \$173 million left to be distributed.

Impacted consumers can still apply for a refund online. People who are eligible for these payouts include Fortnite players who were charged in-game currency for items they didn't want or saw their account locked after complaining to a credit card company about wrongful charges between January 2017 and September 2022 as well as parents whose child made charges on their credit cards without their knowledge from January 2018 through November 2018.

You can learn more about applying for a refund on the FTC's website. □



This Jan. 28, 2015 photo shows the Federal Trade Commission building in Washington.

Associated Press

In an NFL season filled with close games, no one wins more than the Chiefs

By JOSH DUBOW
AP Pro Football Writer

In a season on pace for a record number of close games, no team has been better at pulling them out late than the two-time defending champion Kansas City Chiefs.

Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs tied an NFL record last week by winning their 10th game this season by seven points or fewer a feat accomplished only once before by the 1978 Houston Oilers when Matthew Wright doinked in a 31-yard field goal on the final play for a 19-17 victory over the Chargers.

Kansas City has won three times on a walk-off field goal and is the only team ever to do that with three kickers. Spencer Shrader kicked a 31-yarder to beat Carolina in Week 12 and Harrison Butker made a 51-yarder to beat Cincinnati in Week 2.

That's all part of a perfect 10-0 mark in close games for the Chiefs. Those are 10 of the 114 games that have been decided by seven points or fewer so far this season, the most ever through 14 weeks in NFL history, topping the 112 in 2016. The average scoring margin of 10.7 points per game is on pace to be the fifth-lowest in the Super Bowl era.

The tight wins have helped clinch a ninth straight AFC West title for the Chiefs, extending the second-long-



Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes (15) looks to pass as Los Angeles Chargers defensive tackle Poona Ford (95) defends during the first half of an NFL football game Sunday, Dec. 8, 2024, in Kansas City, Mo.

Associated Press

gest division winning streak in NFL history behind the 11 AFC East crowns in a row New England won from 2009-19.

Kansas City is the 36th team to be 12-1 or better after 13 games despite outscoring the opposition by only 56 points. Only two other teams won at least 12 of the first 13 games with a scoring margin of less than 100: the 1976 Raiders (plus-89) and 1990 49ers (plus-98).

Kansas City has thrived in these situations since Mahomes took over as quarterback starting in 2018.

The Chiefs are 51-19 in the regular season and playoffs with Mahomes at quar-

terback in games decided by fewer than seven points, the best mark ever among the 131 QBs with at least 40 starts in close games.

The other teams thriving in close games this season are Philadelphia and Minnesota, who are each 7-1, and the Detroit Lions, who have won six of seven.

The Giants have been the worst team in games decided by seven points or fewer with a 1-7 record, with the Jets, Jaguars and Bengals all having lost seven out of nine close games.

Awesome Allen

Josh Allen delivered another first in what is turning into a signature season.

A week after becoming the first quarterback credited with a passing, rushing and receiving touchdown in the same game thanks in part to a statistical quirk, Allen put together an even more prolific effort in Buffalo's 44-42 loss to the Los Angeles Rams on Sunday.

Allen became the first player to have three TD passes and three TD runs in a regular-season game as he produced 424 yards to go with those scores. The only other player to pull off that version of a "double triple" was Cleveland's Otto Graham in the 1954 NFL title game against Detroit.

Yet somehow, the Bills

didn't win. Buffalo became the second team in NFL history to score at least 42 points, commit no turnovers and lose, joining the Browns, who did it in a 47-42 loss to the Chargers in 2021. In all, teams had been 315-1 in the Super Bowl era with those stats before Buffalo's loss.

The game was the second with at least five combined TD passes, five combined TD runs and no turnovers. Kansas City and Denver did it Dec. 19, 1965, in a 45-35 win for the Chiefs.

The 86 combined points for the Bills and Rams were the most in a game that featured no turnovers.

Grounded Jets

Even a healthy season from Aaron Rodgers couldn't end the New York Jets' playoff drought.

New York was eliminated from the playoffs for a 14th straight season after losing 32-26 to Miami in overtime, extending the longest active postseason drought in the NFL, NBA, NHL or MLB. The Buffalo Sabres of the NHL have missed the playoffs for 13 straight seasons.

The Jets last made the postseason in the 2010 season when they went to their second straight AFC title game under coach Rex Ryan and quarterback Mark Sanchez.

Since then, New York has gone through five head coaches and 15 starting quarterbacks without getting back to the playoffs. □

U.S. swimmers win relay gold medals as short-course world records are broken in Budapest

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — Multiple world records were shattered at the short-course swimming world championships in Budapest on Tuesday, including by the U.S. men's and women's relay teams.

Gretchen Walsh anchored the U.S. women to the gold medal and a world record in the 4x100-meter freestyle relay in a time of 3 minutes, 25.01 seconds after she broke the world record twice in the women's 50-meter butterfly earlier in the day.

In the men's 4X100-meter freestyle relay,

the U.S. finished ahead of Italy and Poland in a new world record time of 3 minutes, 1.66 seconds.

Other world records were set by 18-year-old Canadian Summer McIntosh in the women's 400-meter freestyle, Kate Douglass of the U.S. in the women's 200-meter medley and Switzerland's Noe Ponti in men's 50-meter butterfly.

The short-course championships are held in a 25-meter pool, which is half the length of an Olympic pool. □



Gretchen Walsh reacts after the team USA won the 4x100 meter final during the World Short Course Swimming Championships in Budapest, Hungary, Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2024.

Associated Press

Tyson Fury vows less clowning and more punching Usyk in the face in heavyweight championship rematch

By BRIAN MAHONEY

AP Sports Writer

Tyson Fury promises less clowning and more punching Oleksandr Usyk in the face during their upcoming rematch for boxing's heavyweight championship.

Usyk won a split decision in May in Saudi Arabia, and they get back in the ring there Dec. 21. Fury doesn't plan to change much from his first loss as a pro, beyond doing everything he can to avoid leaving the result to the judges.

"I'll just throw more this time," Fury said Wednesday. "Keep hitting him in the face more often than I did last time."

The first matchup made



Britain's Tyson Fury, left, punches Ukraine's Oleksandr Usyk during their undisputed heavyweight world championship boxing fight at the Kingdom Arena in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, May 19, 2024.

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Usyk boxing's first undisputed heavyweight champion in 24 years. Fury (34-1-1) quickly activated his right to a rematch, though only three belts will be on the line this time because the IBF stripped Usyk for not facing its mandatory challenger, Daniel Dubois.

Fury is 5-0, with all the wins by stoppage, in rematches, including two knockouts of Deontay Wilder after a draw in their first fight was Fury's only other bout that didn't end with a victory.

The first matchup with Usyk (22-0) was so close that he doesn't see a need for significant strategical changes from seven months ago. "I'm just going to box smart, box clever and if I catch him, get him out of there," Fury said. "Pretty similar to what I did last time. A little bit less clowning around and a bit more focus and that's it, really."

Fury, 36, loves to entertain, and he was putting his arms behind his back and making faces right from the start of the first fight. But perhaps in an acknowledgement to the talent of Usyk, the former cruiserweight champion before moving up to fight the biggest boys, Fury realizes he will need to do less of it.

"I did more clowning than anybody in any high-level fight's ever done," he said. "It's taken my focus away as well, so maybe a little less clowning and more focus on the actual victory. I was messing around too much in there."

But it was a loss of energy, not focus, that Fury said led to the punch that ultimately swung a back-and-forth fight Usyk's way. A left hand stung Fury and Usyk followed up with a flurry of hard shots and was credited with a knockdown though Fury never went to the canvas.

The 6-foot-9 Fury wasn't surprised that he was caught or even that he was hurt by a man he outweighed by about 40 pounds, but blamed himself for allowing it to happen. □